

Information for Food Establishments Regarding COVID-19 and Restrictions on Public Gatherings

On March 12, 2020, Governor Ralph Northam declared a [state of emergency](#) in the Commonwealth of Virginia in response to the continued spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). In accordance with advice from state public health experts, a statewide ban of large gatherings in excess of 100 people is in effect. The [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC) advises to limit gatherings to 50 people or less to reduce the spread of COVID-19 within the community. To further mitigate the spread of this virus, *effective [March 17, 2020](#) food establishments are mandated to significantly reduce their capacity to 10 patrons, or close.*

In an effort to provide guidance to food establishments on how to operate in adherence to guidelines for protecting public health, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) provides the following key concepts and recommendations.

Special of the Day: Social Distancing

What is Social Distancing?

- Social distancing are actions that communities can take to reduce face-to-face contact which may help reduce the spread of disease.

Ways to Encourage Social Distancing in a Food Establishment

- Arrange seating to allow for at least six (6) feet of distance between tables/booths
- Reduce seating to no more than 10 patrons
- Suspend service to standing patrons and bar seating
- Consider allowing only takeout or delivery orders during a portion of your day
- Consider partnering with an online food ordering or delivering platform
- Discourage large dining parties

Suggested Control Measures to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19 in Food Establishments

- **Perform routine environmental cleaning**
 - Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces, including menus and digital ordering systems, condiment containers, salt and pepper shakers, countertops, doors and door handles, etc., with the cleaners that are [EPA-approved for emerging viral pathogens](#). Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label.

- **Provide additional precautions for customers within the establishment**
 - Make sure to keep employee and customer bathrooms stocked with soap and paper towels. Handwashing is one of the best way to prevent COVID-19 transmission.
 - Ensure adequate supply and convenient placement of alcohol-based hand sanitizers for use by customers inside food establishment.
 - Provide extra supplies of napkins or tissues for customers to use when coughing or sneezing.
 - If customer self-service is done within the establishment, consider additional employee oversight so contaminated surfaces can be cleaned, and any contaminated food or utensils can be removed.
 - Based on volume and peak usage of self-service areas, replace utensils in these areas more frequently. Ensure food in self-service areas is properly protected using covers and sneeze shields.

For additional information related to COVID-19, please visit: www.vdh.virginia.gov.